



Honeck conducts Bruckner

by ANTHONY KERSHAW on FEBRUARY 17, 2015 · 0 COMMENTS
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Anton Bruckner: Symphony No. 4
(1878/80 version)
Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra/Manfred Honeck

Reference Recordings FR-713SACD
(66:05)



This is the third offering from Austrian conductor Manfred Honeck, his Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra and Reference Recordings. Reference, long the house sound and domain of Prof. Keith Johnson, is sharing out recording duties these days on its 'Fresh' label. The team at sound/mirror has been entrusted with stamping their own form of brilliance on Reference while maintaining the almost impossible standards set by the Professor.

Each Fresh! release gets better. The entire team — players, conductor, recording company, engineers, all seem to be finding their groove. And, in this new Bruckner



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4, the team has captured something quite special.

The problem, of course, with all new recordings of standard repertoire is matching what has been heard famously and beautifully in previous years while adding something ‘fresh’, if you’ll pardon the term. Many conductors try – ‘listen to the way I do this bit’ – and fail miserably. New recordings of Bruckner are especially vulnerable to this. Change, for change sake. Not Manfred Honeck. He has taken a scholarly approach, done his research (a nicely written note by the conductor explaining his thoughts and process), and implemented it in no uncertain terms by the superb playing of his orchestra.

For devotees of Bruckner, bought up on Bohm and Klemperer, Honeck’s tempos are extreme. The opening horn call, played beautifully by William Cabellero, is very slow. After the introduction, where you expect a slight increase in tempo, it’s hang-on-to-your-hat time – a world away from Bruckner ‘urtext’. Yet, Honeck is using the Bruckner’s original version and swears allegiance to the composer’s wishes.

But let’s forget all the scholarship this and that. It’s important for a good read, but as we listen longer and longer, do we really refer to the words? How does it sound? How does this amazing music make me feel? Well, pretty damn good.

The playing is superlative. The orchestra does not put a step wrong. More importantly, the individual solos that arise out of the din, are calm and reflective, just as they are supposed to be. Heavenly. Mr. Bendix-Blagley, now leading the fiddles of the Berliner Philharmoniker, steers his string section with might and unanimity. Sweetness, too. And the brass section is sensational. Honeck gets them to follow his rubato while maintaining flawless voicing. The balance is Karajan-esque, about the best compliment I can give any brass section in Bruckner.

The recording echoes and amplifies Honeck’s individual, lovely interpretation and

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the performance of the orchestra. Equally sensational. Third time's a charm.

Does this CD replace my two long time favourites — Karl Bohm/VPO/Decca and Otto Klemperer/Philharmonia/EMI? Nope. But it is certainly a fine addition to my Bruckner 'must have' pile. Keep them coming, Fresh!

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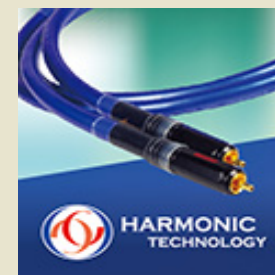
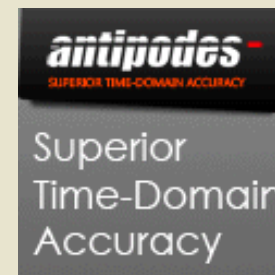
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